

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Duxbury Clipper

David S. Cutler, 66, Clipper publisher

David Sumner Cutler, 66, of Surplus Street, founder of Mariner Newspapers and publisher of the Duxbury Clipper, died Sunday, Feb. 28 after a seven-month fight against cancer. He died surrounded by his family in his favorite spot — a fire-placed living room framed by hand-hewn 18th century Duxbury timbers.

Mr. Cutler was the son of John Henry Cutler and Roberta Sumner Cutler. He and his twin sister were born on the Fourth of July, 1943 in Olathe, Kansas, where his father was stationed with the Navy. In 1945, the Cutlers settled in Duxbury year-round. An important turning point in David Cutler's life came at not yet seven, when over a bridge game at a neighbor's home, his parents let themselves be publicly goaded into promising to start a respectable newspaper in Duxbury. Nineteen days later, on May 11, 1950, the inaugural edition of The Duxbury Clipper appeared. In the first sometimes tenuous years of The Clipper's existence, the observant young Mr. Cutler was absorbing every aspect of the newspaper business in the most intimate and practical way.

In September, 1957, Mr. Cutler entered the class of 1961 at Holderness, a boarding school in Plymouth, New Hampshire, where he was captain of both football and baseball. He went on to Colby College in Maine, where he was again captain of the football team. Upon graduating in 1965, Mr. Cutler went to work at The Patriot Ledger as a beat reporter covering the towns of Abington, Whitman and Rockland. Fifteen months later, Mr. Cutler requested and was granted a three-year leave-of-absence to join the U.S. Marines.

In January, 1967, he went on active duty and entered Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia. After six more months of advanced training, Lieutenant Cutler was sent to Vietnam, where he became commander of a company stationed near the Demilitarized Zone. On a night in March, 1968, Mr. Cutler was pinned down while trying to rescue one of his men. A North Vietnamese sniper bullet went through both legs. There was every chance that he would bleed to death before daylight. But one of the men pinned down with him applied a tourniquet. He survived the night and was rescued by helicopter after sunrise. For his valor he received a Purple Heart, a Navy commendation medal and was later promoted to captain.

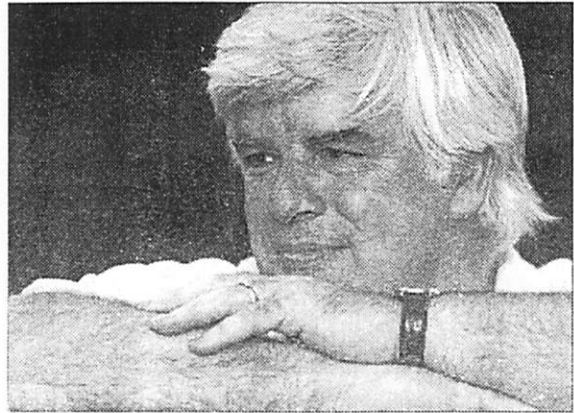


Photo by Chris Bernstein

Mr. Cutler's beat reporting had impressed his editors, and when he returned to The Patriot Ledger in 1970 he was appointed the paper's State House reporter. For the next two years he plied the halls, covering the administration of Gov. Francis Sargent.

In 1972, Mr. Cutler left the security of his position at The Ledger to found The Marshfield Mariner with \$1,000 in vacation pay and a small investment by his partner, Michael Stearns. The Mariner was inaugurated on April 13, 1972 and immediately became Marshfield's paper of record, richly chronicling the town's births, deaths and much of what happened in between.

Two years later The Norwell Mariner appeared, and over the next dozen years papers sprouted in Scituate, Cohasset and Pembroke, eventually spreading as far north to Braintree and south to Plymouth. While the growing company eventually prospered, there were days when his primary meals were snacks he pilfered from his own vending machines. Along the way Mr. Cutler learned a few lessons about the business side of the newspaper business — among them to avoid carrying company checkbooks around in a green garbage bag as they were once tossed in the dumpster by a diligent cleaning woman.

When Mr. Cutler sold the company to Capital Cities/ABC for \$8 million in 1989, Mariner Newspapers boasted 17 community weeklies and 95 full-time employees. The sale came with

a five-year contract to continue to run *Mariner Newspapers*. He would now learn something about the corporate world -- which in the end reminded him too much of military service in a stateside post to be to his long-term taste. As was said in Roman times, better to command a village than be number two in Rome.

A fruit of the Capital Cities/ABC period was the respect Mr. Cutler had for his immediate corporate boss, John Coots, who, by and by, had had enough of "Rome;" and the two decided to become partners and purchased a group of six struggling newspapers in Worcester County. With his partner focused on the business side, Mr. Cutler found himself in the familiar role of community publisher, but this time the challenge was one of turn-around artist. And turn-around they did.

After steering the flagship daily, *The Southbridge Evening News*, back to health, Mr. Cutler and Mr. Coots grew the company through expansion while maintaining the "relentlessly local" credo Mr. Cutler learned in the early days folding *Clippers* in his parent's living room. Today, *Stonebridge Press* and its sister company, *Salmon Press*, now publish one daily and 23 weekly newspapers across three states with nearly 100 full-time employees.

Mr. Cutler had no formal training in business, accounting or "human resources" and often boasted that he'd never taken a journalism course, yet he grew into all these roles, never forgetting the business was, and is, always about people. In the end he was beloved by those people who had worked so closely with him over five decades and three states.

Mr. Cutler was a voracious reader, especially of history, biography and politics. He was a brilliant conversationalist, who could hold his own with the assorted presidential candidates who came calling in New Hampshire every four years. He was passionate about fishing, tennis and a good game of chess.

For all the native competitiveness that fired the newspaperman, Mr. Cutler's greatest passion was his family. The love and support of his wife and children during his final illness enhanced his natural inclination to look at death with equanimity. Early in his illness he said to an old friend, "My life's work was my family, and I've succeeded."

David Sumner Cutler leaves his wife, the Reverend Catherine Cullen, of Duxbury; sisters Margaret Chandler of Maryland and Gail Cutler of Pembroke; sons Josh S. Cutler of Duxbury, Benjamin D. Cutler of New York and Jonathan M. Cullen of West Roxbury; daughters Carolyn M. Cutler of Georgia, Rebecca W. Cutler of Duxbury and Amanda C. Benard of Hingham; as well as seven grandchildren.

Visiting hours will be Wednesday, Mar. 3 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Shepherd Funeral Home in Kingston. A graveside service at Mayflower Cemetery will be held Thursday, Mar. 4 at 10 a.m. A Memorial Service in celebration of Mr. Cutler's life will be held Saturday, Mar. 13 at 5 p.m. at First Parish Church, Duxbury.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Cutler Family Scholarship in care of the Trustees of Partridge Academy, P.O. Box 2552, Duxbury, MA 02331.